

THE DOVE-COLORED DOOR.

A Story of Village Scandal Mongers and a Tragedy Wrought by Women's Idle Tongues. By ELLA HIGGINSON.

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Mrs. Frazer sat down heavily in a low rocking chair and took her darling basket on her lap. She drew a rather large black stocking up over her foot, thrusting her hand well down into her foot and spreading her fingers far apart. She examined it carefully, with her head on one side and a little near-sighted squint in her eye.

Then she threaded a needle and dropped a glass of water, over which she always dived, into the stocking.

"O, mercy on us!" said Mrs. Frazer. She jumped up stiffly, but so suddenly that the darned things rolled all over the floor.

"Just because I'd set out to darn! I could embroider on them pillow shams a month and not a soul would set foot in this house. I wonder who it is!"

She lifted one edge of the shade and peered out cautiously. "O, my! It's Mrs. Dean. I'd almost rather it had been the minister!"

She gathered up the darned implements and the red cotton flannel stocking bag and hurried into the bedroom. She returned in a moment and with a triumphant air laid a partly embroidered pillow sham carelessly on the table, thrust a needle into it and set her thumb beside it. Then she opened the door.

"Why, Mrs. Dean! You don't mean it! Really, now? Well, I'm amazed. I thought you never was comin'. Come right in to see my rubbers. My carpet ain't silk-wary henratty. I never take my rubbers off anywhere. It's too much trouble. If folks don't like my rubbers, they needn't like me—that's all! Love me, love my rubbers," she added, with a comfortable laugh, preceding her guest into the sitting room.

Mrs. Dean sank into her chair. She was a small, colorless woman with cold eyes and a stubborn mouth.

"Such a hill as you live on!" she said in an injured tone. "What possessed you to buy 'way up here'?"

"O, just to get folks something to wonder about," replied Mrs. Frazer, with her mellow, expiring laugh. "Folks are bound to ask questions, you know. If they don't ask what made us build 'way up here they ask why we didn't put a porch clear around, or a bay window in the bath room, or why we run our pipes on the outside of the house."

"Yes," said Mrs. Dean, coldly. Her pale eyes were commencing to let out a little unsuspected fire. She had many nervous moments. Her veil was too short, and she kept putting it over her eyes with a nervous hand to draw it down over her thin chin. Each time it sprang back, like a piece of rubber, and curved in to her lips with every breath.

"You makin' shams?"

"Yes—I was just workin' on 'em."

"The door bell rang."

"Well," said Mrs. Frazer. She got up more slowly this time. She was a large woman, she moved stiffly. "It never rains but it pours."

Sublimely unconscious of her rudeness she went to the door.

"O, Mrs. Hostetter! You is it? Well, I'm right glad to see you. Step in. I guess you know Mrs. Dean?" she added, humorously.

"O, my, yes," said Mrs. Hostetter, sitting on the edge of a chair. She was tall and thin. She stooped slightly.

"I was afraid it might be the minister," Mrs. Frazer replied in a low voice.

"Well, talkin' about the minister," said Mrs. Dean, lowering her voice. "I just want that you should notice how often he goes to Miss Huntley's. I've seen him go there time after time. He's right in his callin' at our house, I notice."

"Why, I wonder where the trunk's a-goin' in that express wagon!"

The other two women came to the window at once.

"There ain't a soul movin' in round here anywhere that I know of. I can't think where it can be goin' to. Bartie's house is right in the way, so's we can't see, even if we was outside."

kind of attack. Gid a doctor!"

"O, don't you see her eyes 's all set out the window. She can't speak—she can't even utter."

Mrs. Hostetter turned and looked out the window. She threw back her head and burst out laughing. "O, that's what's got into her," she said, and went on laughing as if she couldn't stop.

Mrs. Frazer's eyes followed her. The three women sat staring at the dove-colored door. Mrs. Mayhew had come out on her front porch. She had a bird cage in her hand. She stood looking off toward a fir tree that stood in the yard.

Mrs. Hostetter settled comfortably in her chair. "Now you'll see," she said. She drew a gold watch out of a pocket crocheted on her noble bust, and opened it. "In just about fifteen minutes by the watch—you'll see."

The other two women sat on the edges of their chairs and neither moved nor spoke while the minutes got themselves by. Their faces were pale of suspense, their breathing was noiseless. Their backs ached of leaning forward; their eyes of watching.

"Who is it?" asked one woman, in a whisper.

"O, I don't know who it is. He goes there once or twice a week. It's been a-goin' on for three months. Ever since she left off church, an' choir, an' libery board, an' all that sort of thing."

"An' Mr. Mayhew such a nice man!"

"I never hear a word sign him yet."

"An' it seems to be on his side. My mercy! She used to go to the door with him every time he went down town, an' last time he'd he'd up an' kiss her. Like a pair of fool lovers. They'd been married a long time, too. He spent all his evenin's at home with her, unless there was somechin' to go to, an' then he'd always take her. An' if she sung a piece, or played on the piano, or declaimed—my mercy! he just set an' couldn't take his eyes off of her. I never see his beat for admirin' a woman an' lettin' his admire stick out all over him's everythin' but his eyes."

"Well, she's all changed now. He never goes a step with her any more. He never spends an' evenin' at home; an' if she comes to the door with 'im, he just walks off with his head down, kind of slow an' thinkin', an' never so much 's looks back once."

"Mebbe somebody give him a hint," breathed Mrs. Frazer.

Mrs. Hostetter smiled and cleared her throat.

"Mebbe somebody has," she said, mysteriously.

"Mebbe somebody's sent him an' anonymous letter."

Mrs. Hostetter fixed her unexpectedly with a stern gaze. "Mebbe somebody has."

"Well, my land! Don't eat a body up with your eyes so. I wain't accusin' you."

"Well, you can if you want," said Mrs. Hostetter, undaunted.

something' was a-goin' on right under our very noses—her voice strengthened as she went on—"an' we concluded we'd come an' have a talk with you—"

"We've seen you hang that birdcage out on the right-hand side of the door; an' then we've seen that fellow come an' stay an' stay. We don't propose to have such goin'-ons right under our noses. You've got him hid here some, now. If your husband can't put a stop to it, we can."

She paused, and there was intense silence for a moment. Then the old woman cried out: "Why don't you give 'em a cheer?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Mayhew, and laughed out scornfully. But almost instantly her face showed contrition.

"O, I didn't mean that," she cried, turning imploringly to the women. "I beg that I will forgive me. I know you mean this in kindness, but your words cut my heart like knives."

"O, we didn't calculate to be received on two chips," piped out Mrs. Dean. "We braced up to do our duty like Christians, no matter how hard we might be insulted."

"You can't deceive us an' atom," put in Mrs. Frazer, determined to have her laurels, too. "Not an atom. We have seen everything. We have even seen the cold feelin's betwixt you an' Mr. Mayhew—a man that this fall took from one end to the other, looks up to. Everybody has seen the cold feelin's that's come betwixt you."

Now, indeed, Mrs. Mayhew was like a white lily, smitten and crushed by a storm. She clung, trembling, to the chair and looked at them with dark, terrified eyes.

"This—is this my mother," she faltered. "She is old and feeble, and she—she had trouble. It affected her mind. I had her brought here, so I could care for her as a daughter should."

"But he was an' atom," she made it hard for me to do my duty to her. I almost went mad myself. I gave up everything, and there was so much work—I could not have even one servant. I could not bear that any one should know—She was my mother, my dear. She died two years ago."

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"Oh, he is in the house now, is he?" cried Mrs. Dean, in her shrill staccato. "You'd like us to believe that, would you? You'd like us to believe that, would you? You'd like us to believe that, would you?"

"Nothing would make us believe your husband is in this house now but seein' him in the flesh and blood," said Mrs. Hostetter, solemnly.

"You see, the Lord have mercy on you poor sinful woman! Your only hope of salvation is to make a full confession of your sins. Bring out the partner of your guilt," she exhorted in a loud voice. "Bring him out, an' let him suffer the awful effects of his secret sin. Nothing can save either of us unless you bein' purged with fire. Mebbe you think it was pleasant for us to come here an' be insulted? We've done our duty like Christian women, an' we're ready to leave it all to the Lord. Bring out the partner of your guilt."

Her face faltered. The door of an inner room had opened. A young man came slowly toward them.

Not greatly like a triumphant lover looked he. He was pale and haggard. The three women started and grasped hold of one another convulsively. He faced them with an air of desperation.

"You want to know who I am?" he said. "She'd die to lose her reputation forever before she'd tell you, but I'll tell you. I'm her brother; the son of her mother. I live in a hut up in the forest, and I don't dare to show my wretched face to man. I'm an escapee convict from the penitentiary, where I sat for forty years. I'm guilty, sure, but I'm my father's son. I'm my mother's son. It is my fault that my old mother sits there in bed a jibbering idiot. It is my fault that this awful burden is on my sister. Yet twice a week for months she has been letting me come here, because my mother knows me and is calmed by my presence. Only an angel would have clung to such an abandoned wretch as I am and tried to make a man of him. She has never once reproached me; never lost faith that I will yet be a man. Her husband, modest lad, was a guilty, repentant wretch, who had nothing to brag about to inform me that he was not at home, but that none of her kindly interested neighbors were making afternoon visits. Since you have known of my visits for six months I am almost stunned with wonder that you did not drop in before. Marvel, in fact, that you did not take up your bed and board in this unhappy home. Your delicate self-repression fills me with admiration."

He paused for a second, in absolute need of breath. When he spoke again a glance at his sister's face, which showed signs of deep suffering, had changed his look and tone. "Well," he said, deliberately, "you have invaded the sacredness of my sister's home. You have worried out her sorrowful secrets. You have tried to estrange her husband from her. You have wounded down your sister's heart, and you have left her left to be near her mother and sister, whose lives he had ruined, and who must now start out again on his lonely wandering with no place in which to lay his head. You belong to the church. You call yourself a Christian. Are these the things Christ taught you to do? Are these—"

"Hey, hey!" cried the old creature on the bed. "What's all this fuss about?" She peered at them with dreadful eyes; she

pupils were like little blue-black bullets. "Why don't you give 'em a cheer? They don't look like ladies; but give 'em a cheer anyhow."

"And now," concluded the young man, walking to the door of the inner room and throwing it open, "my sister's husband will say a few words to you, and then we will respectfully permit you to depart."

When the three women became convinced that it was really Mr. Mayhew who was entering their faces were things to behold and remember. Mrs. Frazer confessed afterward that she had a "giddy feeling—as if she'd let all hots go; the very carpet it self went up and down in waves under her."

Mrs. Dean shrank back against the wall for support. Mrs. Hostetter's fine fighting feathers dropped, but she stood her ground bravely.

Mr. Mayhew advanced and stood beside his wife. He was pale and worn-looking. He spoke in quiet, even tones, but in a clear, strong voice.

"I have heard all that my wife said, although she did not mean for me to hear it, and I am glad. She spoke the truth. I

What a Personal Involvement. Detroit Journal. "Will you kindly say in your paper that Mr. William Jones is visiting in Boston?" asked the man.

"We charge to cents a line for personals," replied the editor.

"Very well," said the man. "I will hardly take more than one line, I suppose."

The editor wrote, and read aloud as he wrote—

"Mr. William Jones is visiting friends in Boston. The William Jones who is visiting friends in Boston is not William Jones, the grocer, who has just got in a carload of fresh cucumbers, which he will sell at your own price, or Dr. William Jones, who cures deafness by electricity; or Prof. William Jones, the palmist, who tells your past and future for \$1; or Hon. William Jones, who is being elected by his friends to run for congress; or Bill Jones—a sure, never gripe. Here there followed the sound of scurrying feet. The editor was alone.

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Chicago Tailor. "I went prepared. I got a full dress suit," asked the guest, "in order to get dinner at this hotel."

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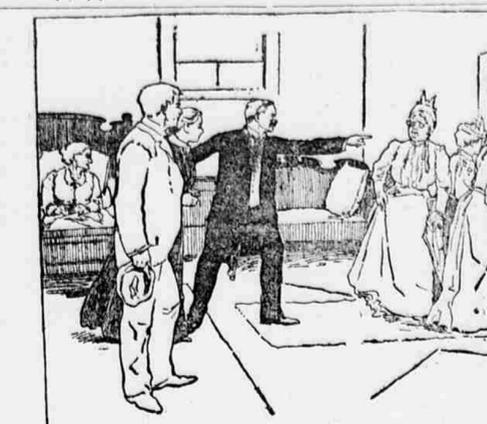
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